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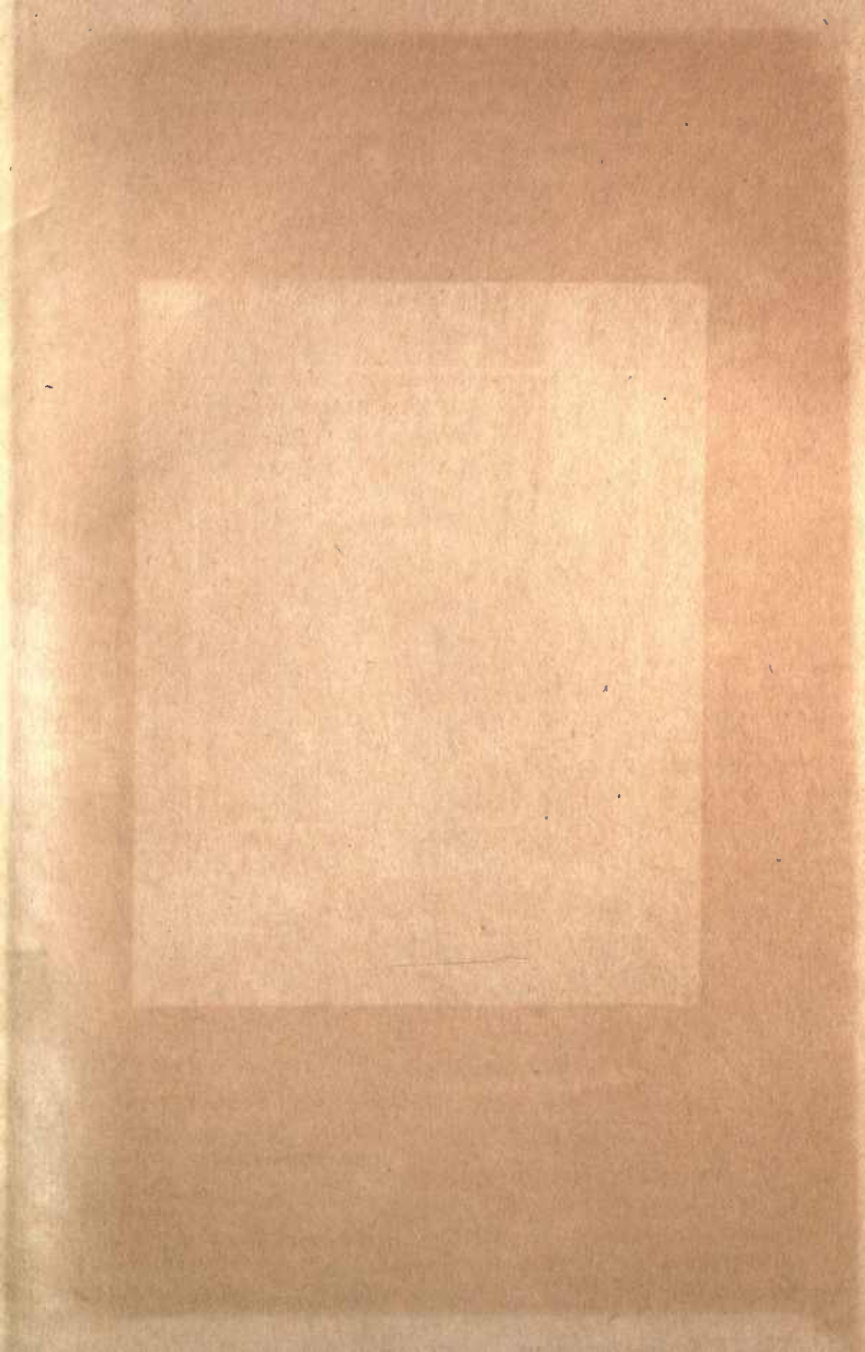


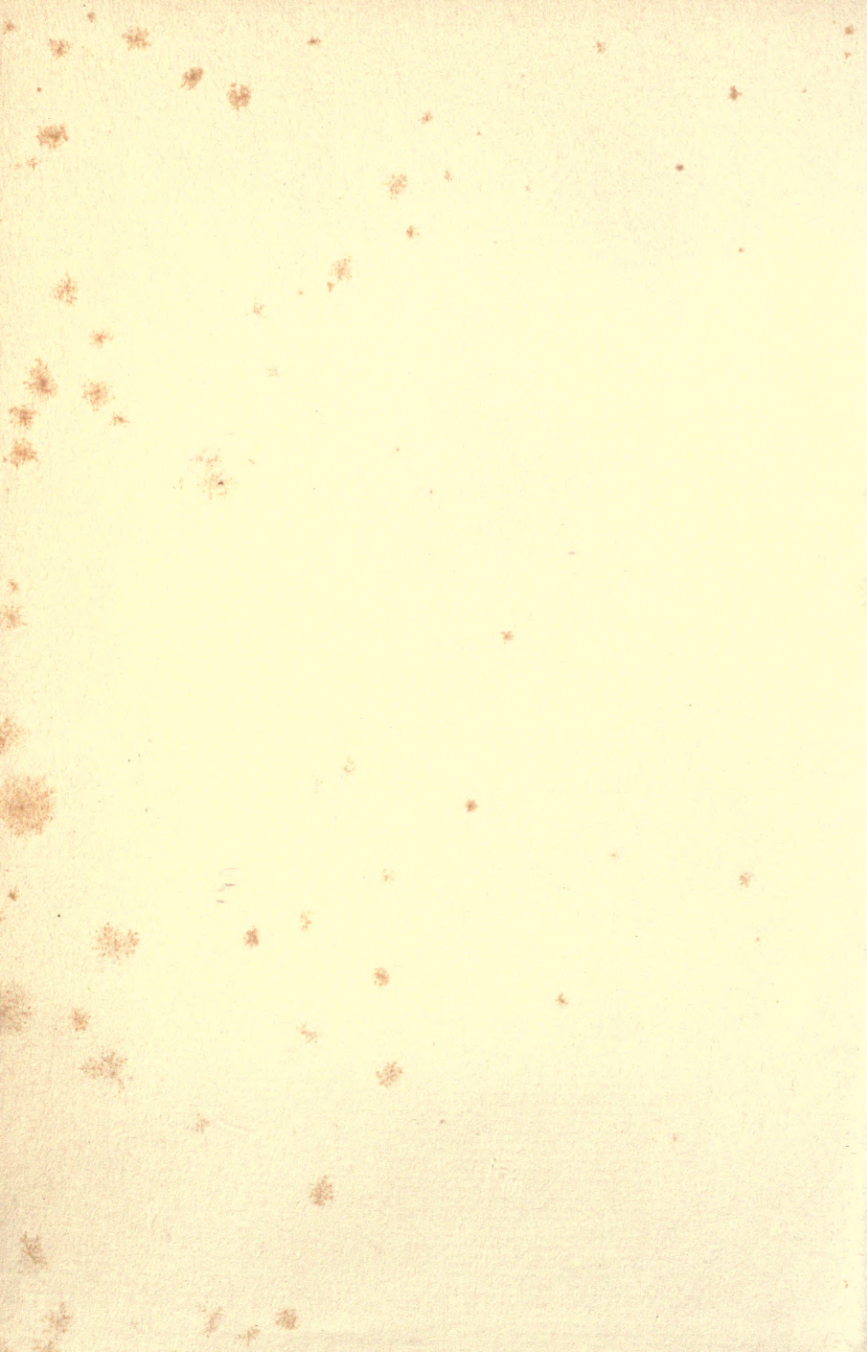
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A STUDY
WALTER PHELPS DODGE

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King Charles I : a Study

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THE CRESCENT MOON

JOHN LONG, LIMITED, LONDON



KING CHARLES I

FROM THE PORTRAIT IN MIDDLE TEMPLE HALL

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King Charles I

A Study

By

Walter Phelps Dodge

Of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-Law

Author of "Piers Gaveston," "From Squire to Prince,"
"The Real Sir Richard Burton"

With Frontispiece



London

John Long, Limited

Norris Street, Haymarket

MCMXII

First published in 1912

TO
ADA, STUART AND ROSEMARY

2087929



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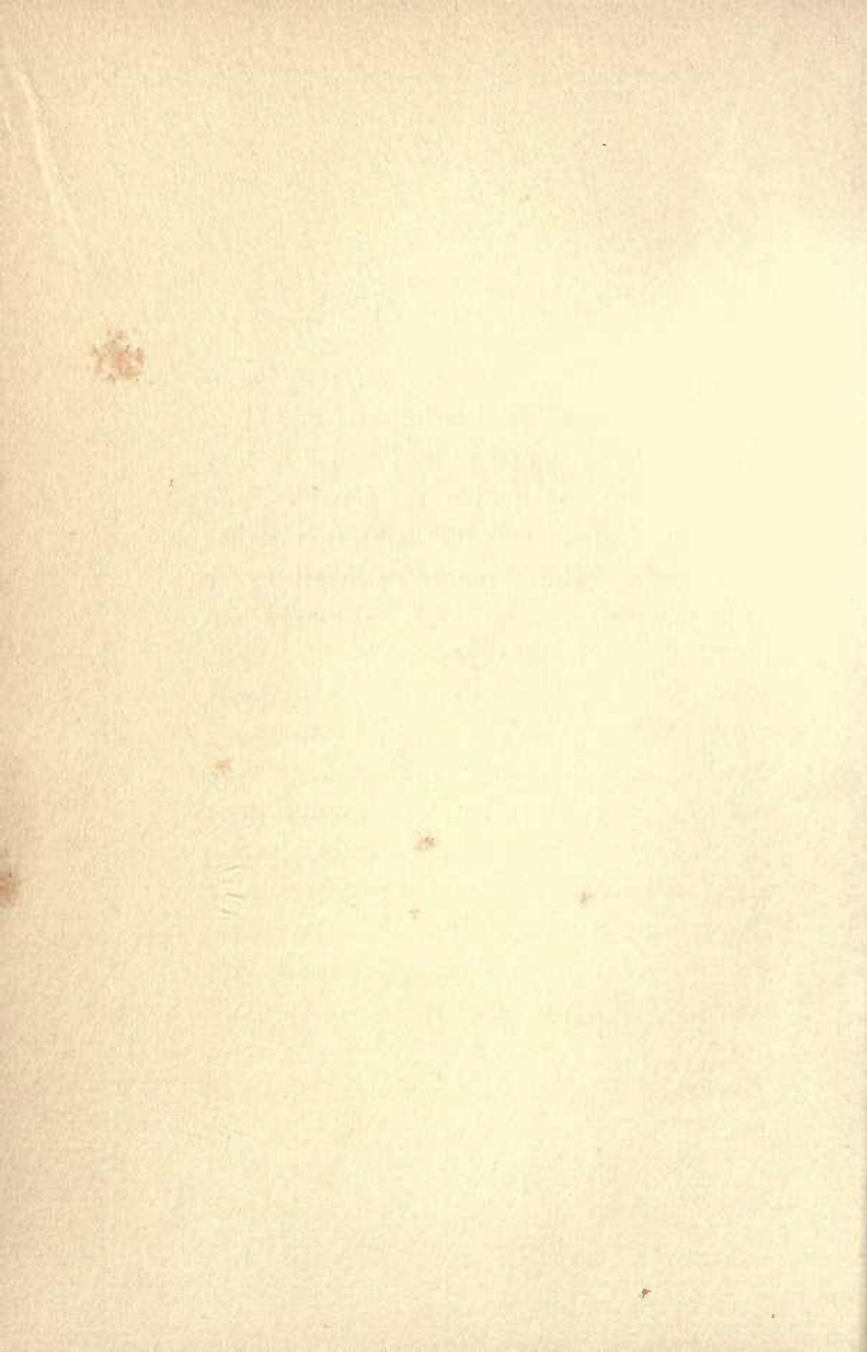
Author's Note

OLIVER CROMWELL has for so long been overpraised that the reaction was bound to come. Modern interest in English history turns from the Puritan to the Cavalier, and the world realizes that the deification of the Huntingdon Squire has been overdone—a mere temporary eclipse of the more enduring fame of the White King.

One finds endless books on Cromwell, ancient and modern ; few writers, however, have devoted themselves to Charles I. For this reason the Author hopes that there may be room for a study of the Stuart King.

REFORM CLUB, LONDON

June 13th, 1912



King Charles I: a Study

CHAPTER I

THE STUARTS

A WORLD of romance, of loyalty, of faithfulness unto death belongs to those words "The Stuarts." Was ever such a family known before? Will ever such a family come again into the ken of sordid politicians prating ape-like of a "democracy" they fail to understand? Mary Queen of Scots—Charles I—The Old Chevalier—Bonnie Prince Charlie—and perhaps one might add Charles II, the Merry Monarch. Three dour Stuarts only add to the lustre of the others—James I, James II, and Henry—*de Jure* the Ninth—Cardinal York.

What was the charm of the Stuarts?

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Why did men die for them blithely with "God Save the King" on their lips? The Stuart charm was subtle, elusive, magnetic—the charm of a dignity of long descent added to a very human chain of faults, faults that were generous always. To use a modern word, the Stuarts were victims of temperament—an obstinate vein of sadness pursued their gayest moments, a haunting sense of tragedy paralysed too often their efforts. One might almost say that Predestination was the fly in their ointment.

Charles I would have been a better King north of the Tweed. He was more of a Scot than an Englishman. It is too often forgotten that he was, in a sense, a foreign Prince, a foreign King.

The average man knows that James I was the successor of Queen Elizabeth and that Mary Queen of Scots was his mother. He knows also that the Stuarts were reigning in Scotland when the vacant English Throne came to King James. It

is odd that the dry bones of History are so seldom clothed with even a tithe of the interest belonging to them. The average historian is accurate but uninteresting. The Stuarts were Scottish nobles before they were Scottish Kings. On the whole, in spite of the ever-present rivalry of the powerful House of Douglas, who originally claimed the Scottish Throne, they ruled firmly if not wisely. The poetic imaginative strain in the Stuarts appealed to Gael and Celt, if not to smug Lowlanders. Quick at a jest, they never lost their level of kingly dignity. The Stuart charm was at its best in Mary Queen of Scots, who, as she showed most clearly the virtues of the race, betrayed too plainly their faults. Brave but obstinate, clever but vacillating, persistent but persuadable, she—like all the Stuarts—could not play a waiting game. Her cleverness was impatient of lesser men with smaller minds, and the intolerable self-sufficiency of that

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overrated man John Knox gave rise to unwisely scathing comments on his mind, body and estate—comments that cost her and her successors dear. Nothing feeds hatred like ridicule, and the Stuart sense of humour was unfortunately too keen for the heavy wits of Edinburgh and London. There was ever a pinch of Attic salt in the witticisms of the Stuarts, and their jests were too often at the expense of their friends. Too much has been written—and imagined—of the Stuart belief in rule by Divine Right. On the other hand, if the Stuart Kings had believed less in themselves and more in Divine Right, their story would be more commonplace and less interesting. The least of the Stuarts, James I, was the most convinced that he reigned by direct wish of the Creator. Had his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, succeeded Elizabeth the prospects opening before the family would have been brighter. According to Skelton, Fortune played a scurvy trick in bringing first to

the English Throne the only Stuart who was a grotesque and undignified pedant. He was the son of his father more than his mother. No trace of her fatal fascination lurked in his heavy features and heavier wits. Much undeserved sympathy for his mother's execution hung around him, but Romance was far to seek in him or his. The tendency of the Stuarts towards favourites was both a misfortune and a fault; although the melancholy ghost of Piers Gaveston might have wailed a warning. Having ruled Scotland for centuries, the problem before the House of Stuart at the "setting of that bright Occidental Star Queen Elizabeth"—as the King James Version of the Prayer Book has it—was the ruling of England for centuries to come. A stronger man than James I would have doubted; but he, strong in his conceit, brave in his vanity, calmly mounted the vacant Throne, and laid the foundation-stone of the tragedy of Whitehall. It

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must not be forgotten that the Stuarts reaped the whirlwind where the Tudors had sowed the wind. The misrule of Henry VIII, the tyranny of Queen Mary, the absolute rule of Queen Elizabeth—all these had roused a spirit of opposition in the Commons and in the country.

The Tudors were followed by the Stuarts, and curiously enough the first of the English Stuarts was Tudor in all but name. In this way King Charles I was heavily handicapped when he came to the Throne.

CHAPTER II

KING JAMES I

To understand Charles I, the character and reign of his father, James I, must be considered, little as it tempts the student of the House of Stuart.

James I, the son of Mary Queen of Scots and Darnley, was born soon after the killing of Rizzio in 1566. In 1589 he wooed and married Anne of Denmark with the one faint touch of romance in the whole of his dull and gloomy character—the wisest fool in Christendom, as Sully called him. The chroniclers of the day speak of him as “gey ill to live wi’.”

Of the five children three survived: Henry Prince of Wales, born in 1594; Charles, born at Dunfermline in 1600; and Elizabeth, who married the Elector Palatine and became

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the ancestress of King George V, who may claim, in a sense, to be a "Stuart King."

The accession of King James was popular with Catholics, Puritans and Anglicans alike. He was welcomed by the adherents of the "Old Faith" as the son of that Mary Queen of Scots who had been a faithful Daughter of the Church. The Puritans thought as a Scot he would sympathize with their views, while the Anglicans—having regard to his education in Protestant theology and his partially successful attempts to super-impose Episcopacy on the Scotch Presbytery—gave way to joyful anticipations of his probable course. How he disappointed each and all in turn may be read in the monumental pages of Rawson Gardiner. The Puritanic leaven in the Commons was not well disposed to James as time went on, and there wanted not Members to whisper that the King's title to the Throne was not a parliamentary title, Henry VIII having preferred the family of his sister Mary to the family of

his sister Margaret. James, however, was King, and took good care not to lose sight of the fact. The constant quarrel between King and Commons related chiefly to subsidies—a sordid ground of contention. The Commons in their small-minded jealousy of the King cannot be defended. In their wish to rule they neglected the foreign interests of the country—predecessors of the “Little Englanders” of to-day. Both Commons and people complained that the King ignored the popular prejudice against Spain and a Spanish marriage for the heir to the Crown. The Armada was not forgotten in England. To James, however, *suprema lex regis voluntas*, and he was content in his fatuous self-sufficiency. Indeed the sacrifice of Sir Walter Raleigh to please the King of Spain was regretted by no less a person than Henry Prince of Wales, who angrily asked, “Why does my father keep such a bird in the cage?”

Sir Walter Scott in the *Fortunes of Nigel*

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gives a capital picture of the Court of King James, while Calderwood in his *Collections* is illuminating.

The domestic life of the King was not ideal. Anne, the Queen, was frivolous and only eager for amusement. Their oldest son, Henry Prince of Wales, was brave and determined, giving promise of a strong character to come. He was generous and lovable, protecting always his delicate younger brother Charles, whom he promised half in jest to make Archbishop of Canterbury. The Prince of Wales was not fond of books, but liked an open-air life, and wished to be a soldier, and more especially a sailor. He was devoted to his sister Elizabeth, and knightly to all women. A letter from Charles to Henry has been preserved showing the relations between the brothers as well as giving a glimpse of the Royal writer :—

“Sweet, sweet brother, I thank you for your letter. I will give anything that I have to you, both my horses and my books and

my pieces or my crossbows or anything that you would have. Good brother, love me and I shall ever love and serve you."

It was a sad day for England and for the Stuarts when Henry was struck down by a fierce attack of typhoid from which he failed to recover. His death in time made Charles King.

CHAPTER III

CHARLES PRINCE OF WALES

WHEN he was baptized Charles had been created Duke of Albany December 23rd, 1600; he was made Duke of York January 16th, 1605, and upon the death of his elder brother he was in due course created Prince of Wales. As a child he was weak and fragile, and gave his medical attendants much worry. It was chiefly owing to his governess, Lady Carey, that Charles outgrew his childish ailments, as well as the lisp he had inherited from his father. From a shy and delicate boy he grew into a stately, thoughtful youth, fond of outdoor sports and the possessor of sturdy health. Of his sister Elizabeth Charles was fond, and his devotion was returned by the fascinating

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future Queen of Bohemia, who had much of the charm of her grandmother, the Queen of Scots.

The influence of the King and Queen over their surviving son was less than nothing. The frivolous Queen, rushing from ballroom to cloister, always at one extreme or the other, did not understand her grave and meditative son ; while the clowning of the King jarred the princely dignity of Charles. The Prince talked too little—his reticence grew into silence as he advanced in age, while his Royal father talked too much. It was a curious Court ; the King pedantically wise and foolish by turns, familiar, lacking in dignity ; the Queen flighty, religious ; the Prince of Wales walking apart with a melancholy mien and disdainful air, while the witty Princess Elizabeth made fun of each and all. The shrewd Scotch common sense of which the King had a share, was partly lacking in

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the Prince of Wales. The suppressed anger felt by Charles at his father's lack of dignity found a vent in complaints to Buckingham, who was his favourite, as well as his father's. A noble nature driven in upon itself by uncongenial surroundings, is apt to sour or smoulder until an ill-advised explosion gives relief. Charles was never soured, but his lack of self-control at times was dangerous to himself and not safe for England. Why his father called him "Baby Charles" is hard to guess, for his character is ill-defined by the clumsy pet name. Buckingham was a clever man to be loved alike by men so different as the first James and the first Charles. His sudden rise destroyed the perfect balance of his mind. He was "Steenie" to both, and posed as the best friend of the lonely Prince. Buckingham's influence over Charles was not so bad as some historians infer. His counsels were indeed rash and dangerous,

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but not actively bad. At times the King endeavoured to impress his views of the divine right of kingship upon his heir—"That which concerns the mystery of the King's power is not lawful to be disputed," may be called a sententious summing up of the views of the King.

In time the King grew tired of Buckingham, particularly after the Spanish fiasco ; but he retained his affection for "Steenie" to the end.

In theology Charles took but little interest, although he had his grandmother's dislike for sour Puritanism, that Puritanic spirit so often serving as a cloak for cold-blooded dissipation—your full-blooded Puritan is ever a hypocrite.

As a linguist Charles was distinguished ; he was well grounded in law and mathe-
matics, and a good classical scholar. Music and art claimed him actively as well as a patron. His collection of pictures was

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priceless—a collection afterwards dispersed by the boorish spite of Cromwell.

Charles was a man of medium height. An indefinable air of haunting sadness clings about the mournful dignity of all his portraits. His grey eyes contrasted with his chestnut hair and dark colouring, while his high forehead showed intellect of no mean order. His smile was fascinating, and his address winning. He was called by Browning "the man with the mild voice and the mournful eyes," while the changing intonations of his speech gave his least word a charm it hardly deserved. In disputing Charles was quick, yet solid ; his arguments carefully marshalled, well reasoned and well put ; often he astonished a disputant by his instant grasp of a situation. He was a clever man of good judgment ; but a certain mental laziness, added to a lack of self-control, often made him take a course insufficiently thought out. A

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clean delicacy of mind distinguished the Prince of Wales from his early years, enabling him to walk unstained through the corruption of his father's Court, and made him, as a young man, able to blush like a girl at broad expressions. As he grew older, the Prince often listened to the debates in the House of Lords, and constantly settled disputes between the haughty Buckingham and the older peers, affronted by his meteoric rise. When he chose to exert himself Charles showed a wonderful tact and power of managing men. He knew his powers, but often his scorn of feebler minds led him to ignore situations he might easily have dominated.

As Charles approached maturity the question of his marriage became more pressingly important. Here the King was tactless. He ignored the dislike for Spain inherent in English minds since Queen Mary had married the King of Spain. The Spanish

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diplomat Gondomar was a clever man, and looked forward to another Royal Spanish alliance with England. The Infanta herself, however, was not anxious for the match, and her brother Philip disliked the idea, as did Philip's greatest and most trusted Minister Olivarez. Charles had fallen in love with an exquisitely painted miniature of the Infanta in 1622, and the romance of the possible marriage of a Prince of Wales to a Spanish Princess appealed strongly to him, so that Buckingham's suggestion of a sudden visit to Spain was welcomed.

Rawson Gardiner, with a great lack of historical perspective, unduly blames Charles for his share in this knight errantry. On their way to Madrid the Prince and Buckingham passed through Paris, where they caught a glimpse of the Princess Henrietta Maria, daughter of Henry IV and Marie de Medicis, and future Queen of England. At this time, however, the thoughts of

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Charles were fixed on the Spanish Alliance, both on account of his romantic passion for the Infanta and because he thought such a marriage would consolidate his sister's position as wife of the Elector Palatine. Once, however, arrived at Madrid, Charles found that amateur diplomacy even when evolved from the astute mind of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was a broken reed. The Palatinate was sacrificed and the Infanta was adamant. She wished to marry no heretic Prince. This rebuff was unwholesome for Charles, and angered intensely the King of England. Charles is said to have welcomed the fleet that was to carry him home with enthusiasm ; while Buckingham became the bitter foe of Spain and the Spanish Royal House. King James, seriously disturbed, resolved to lose no further time ; and an Embassy was at once despatched to Paris to demand the hand of the Princess Henrietta Maria from the

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Queen Mother, and from her brother King Louis XIII.

At this time the Princess was in her fifteenth year, and is described by the Special Ambassador as "a lovely, sweet young creature. Her growth is not great yet but her shape is perfect." The Princess, on her part, mused long and happily over a miniature of the Prince of Wales. The marriage was of course a political one—a move on the European chessboard. A matrimonial alliance between France and England would cry "Check" to the ambitions of Spain ; and the Prince of Wales would secure a lovely and youthful bride, half in love with his miniature. Of course King James and his Ministers got the worst of the long-drawn-out negotiations. Richelieu was more than a match for them all. Finally the marriage treaty was signed on December 12th, 1624. But now the weary old King was ready to lay down his burden

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of Empire ; as a King he had been a pathetic failure, as a man he was not a success. Deep learning was his, but no useful knowledge ; undignified, yet claiming more than Royal dignity, the son of Mary Queen of Scots went down to his grave unmourned, unhonoured and unwept. James I died on March 27th, 1625, and Charles I reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACCESSION OF KING CHARLES I

THE Prince of Wales had been a haughty, dreamy youth, disdainful of his father's Court—a stately, lonely figure with a touch of the mysterious sadness that genius often shows—magnetic alike to man and woman—the embodied spirit of romance. Such was Charles the Prince; what of Charles the King? A very serious sense of the responsibilities of kingship had been developed in the Prince of Wales, but he somehow failed to realize the spirit of the times. In the full-blooded Henry VIII the people had rejoiced. Edward VI was beloved as one understood of the people. Mary's reign was not a success. England was proud of her Virgin Queen—but James I had appealed neither to the State nor to party

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or faction. With the irritation induced by his reign his unfortunate and well-meaning son had to contend. It was a bitter heritage.

The beginning of the new reign was auspicious. About six weeks after the death of King James, Princess Henrietta Maria was married by proxy to Charles King of England on May 1st, 1625, before the great west door of Notre Dame. On the 16th of June the Queen arrived in London and received a great popular welcome. All things promised well for the House of Stuart.

The political creed to which Charles during his reign was consistent has its admirers as well as its opponents; to this day there is an element in English public life that finds it hard to keep its temper when Charles I is praised; and, on the other hand, the absurd and ridiculous Legitimist and Jacobite Societies and Leagues are out of court. They hardly exist. It is,

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however, hard to defend the Commons during the reign.

Rawson Gardiner says of the Lower House, "it was as yet but an incoherent mass." Mistakes were made by King and Commons alike. Both were at fault. Charles, however, acted with a single eye to the interests of his country ; the Commons had a whole-souled devotion to their own. When an irresistible force meets an immovable rock, something is apt to happen, and happen many things did. John Richard Green, in his distorted view of this reign, glorified the Puritans, who were gradually coming to the front in Parliament. Macaulay, however, takes the saner view, in giving as a reason for the Puritans' dislike of bear-baiting, not the pain suffered by the bear, but the pleasure felt by the on-lookers.

The first twenty years of the reign had many crowded hours. Events marched

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rapidly, and there was no pause in the procession of important happenings.

The Royal Marriage Alliance with France had proved a stumbling-block to Spain. Neither Gondomar nor Philip proved a match for Richelieu—the Master Diplomat. Later, indeed, Cromwell's mistaken foreign policy—so bitterly analysed by Bolingbroke—in strengthening the French power has been strongly criticized by later writers. According to Skelton, the political situation in England may be separated into three periods—the first, one of constitutional development on normal lines; the second, showing a disregard for constitutional precedent; the third, a period of civil war culminating in the farcical trial and murder of the King—leading to a Restoration.

The first mistake of the new reign was the predominance of Buckingham. His foreign adventures were more or less failures; as one studies the course of events in Holland, before Cadiz, at Rochelle, one

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marvels at the lack of judgment shown by the Duke. Brilliant—erratic—self-sufficient, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, drove by his ill success and insolence the first nail in the oncoming scaffold at Whitehall. The King (less haughty as King than he had been as Prince) and Queen (“nimble and black-eyed, brown-haired, and in a word a brave lady”) were personally popular ; and it needed the four years of Buckingham’s control to diminish the love of the people for their King. It was, however, a bad four years for England ; Buckingham was the evil genius of the King.

CHAPTER V

THE KING AND THE COMMONS

THE first Parliament of Charles was not unlike the last Parliament of James. As usual the Commons lost no time in asserting themselves. At the beginning of a new reign the great permanent revenues of the Crown were voted for life by means of a grant known as "tonnage and poundage." In their insolence—an insolence no Tudor Sovereign would have stood for a moment—in defiance of precedent, the Commons voted this grant for one year only—an impudent encroachment on Constitutional usage.

The new Bill, however, did not get through the House of Lords—then, as now, the vigilant guardian of the public interest; and the duties were levied as before by Crown officers.

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The request of the King for "subsidies" having been only partially granted, the Finance Minister—at the King's order—renewed the request when the Houses met at Oxford. The King himself condescended to make a personal request. His whole revenues had been exhausted in the public service ; he was cramped for means to pay the Royal obligations—he was young and at the beginning of his reign. If he now met with kind and dutiful usage it would endear the Parliament to him and preserve a perfect accord between himself and his subjects.

But the faithful Commons were stubborn. They cherished legends of the contemptuous way in which they had been flouted by Queen Elizabeth, and thirsted for revenge. Their reasons for refusal were commonplace—they objected to Buckingham's foreign policy, they did not approve of the war, and pretended they were acting in the public interest.

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Charles' strong Anglicanism was suspect by the narrow Puritans in the Commons. They wished to establish eternal damnation by Statute, and Calvin was their patron saint. It is a curious commentary on their success that there is now in America—of all places—a “Church of St. Charles the Martyr.”

The King made a mistake in beginning his relations with the Commons by a request. Henry VIII would have ordered where Charles I entreated. It was too late when Charles, conscious of his mistake, dissolved abruptly his first Parliament. Charles became King in March, 1625, and before 1630 three separate Parliaments had been summoned and dissolved. Comment is needless.

The situation—rapidly becoming a crisis—speaks for itself. The Commons would not grant supplies until their so-called “grievances” were redressed.

At this time injudicious writers widened

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the breach by foolish books on the doctrine (they made it a dogma) of Divine Right and the virtue of passive obedience. As always—they were “*plus Royalistes que le Roi*” and did the Royal Stuart no good service.

The Commons were wrong from the standpoint of constitutional law and legal history—their refusal to grant supplies made it difficult for the King to keep his treaty engagements with Gustavus Adolphus and Christian of Denmark.

The hired assassins of Tilly swept like locusts over the cities of Northern Germany, because the Commons of England refused to follow precedent. It is admitted now that the Commons went too far for public safety in their attempted grasp of power ; and the Petition of Right was the only legislative fruit—rare but unrefreshing—of these successive Parliaments which is worthy of mention. It was technically a “declaratory Statute,” and was the cause of much

The King and the Commons 43

argument among gentlemen of the long robe. The question at issue was simple : could a subject be imprisoned by the King unless the cause of imprisonment appeared on the warrant ? Naturally there were cases where it was against the public interest to state the cause, and this was generally admitted. A Resolution was passed by the Lords to the effect that the power of the King was regal as well as legal ; this, however, was displeasing to the Commons, more tender of their privileges than of their honour, and an impasse was averted. Finally both Houses declared that the Act was not to be considered as affecting the Prerogative—a lawyer's futile compromise.

Rawson Gardiner aptly says that many a compensating change would be needed before the real preponderance in the Constitution passed from King to Commons.—

Sir John Eliot was the only leader of any weight in these short-lived early Parliaments of Charles I. The absurd praise lavished

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on him is to be wondered at ; he was an average orator, and possessed many of the elements of the party hack. His jealousy of Buckingham resulted in a torrent of invective, strewn with false accusations unsupported by any proof. His ridiculous comparison of Buckingham with Sejanus of Tacitus was cleverly characterized by the King, who said, when dissolving Parliament, "If the Duke is Sejanus I must be Tiberius." Eliot's attack on Buckingham was the direct cause of the Duke's murder by the half-witted Felton, who brooded over what he supposed to be his country's wrongs until his mind gave way ; and a knife-thrust at Portsmouth ended the brilliant life of the favourite.

The disputes with the Commons fretted Charles and did not improve his temper. More than once he went down to the House and reproved the Members :—

"Mr. Speaker, here is much time spent in enquiring into grievances. I would have

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more time bestowed in preventing and redressing them."

The childish charges of "bad faith" made against the King arose in connection with his supposed mental reservations in connection with the Petition of Right—a measure he naturally, holding to his Royal Prerogative, regarded with little favour. But who could define the "mental reservations of the King"? The charge refutes itself. That the King acted hastily in ordering Eliot's arrest for words spoken in the House is true, but that Eliot was a "Parliamentary Martyr" is absurdly untrue.

Charles was wiser in addressing the Commons on the Petition of Right. He said:—

"And I assure you that my maxim is that the people's liberties strengthen the King's prerogatives, and that the King's prerogative is to defend the people's liberties."

King and people were alike wearied by constant Parliamentary quarrels. The coun-

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try was as tired of the Commons as the King. Little blame attaches to Charles for his decision to try personal rule for a time. The country had confidence in its King and little or none in its Commons. How would the experiment succeed ?

CHAPTER VI

THE KING

THE period of personal rule from 1629 to 1640 was peaceful and prosperous. These eleven years without a Parliament gave a much-needed rest to the country, sick of wrangling and talk for talk's sake. Even in these enlightened days an eleven-years' rest from dreary debates would not be unwelcome, particularly as in this year of Grace 1912 the House of Commons is notoriously unrepresentative of the people. As a benevolent despot King Charles I was more of a success than as a King with a Parliament. The years between the Parliaments were among the most pleasant in the life of Charles. Political persecutions were unknown, tonnage and poundage were quietly levied, and there was peace in the

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land. True, the electoral franchise was paralysed for the moment, but nobody was a penny the worse ; and private judgment was unlimited.

An illuminating example of the difference between historians is found in the opinion of the Puritans—they were fanatics who misclaimed the name—expressed by Carlyle and Hume. To the former they were heroes, to the latter eccentrics. As a matter of fact they were to a certain extent both.

Cromwell was called by Hume a fanatical hypocrite—no bad description of the man who was to his enemies the arch-traitor ; who boasted “a sturdy red ridge of nose and a coarse fleshy face, swollen and dark.” Contrast this description with a contemporary one of the King. “King Charles looked well—a stately melancholy in his delicate features, that saddened the beholder bending low before him.”

There is a baffling something in the personality of the King that defies analysis.

No one—with the possible exception of his grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots—has been so bitterly blamed. No one has been so unwisely praised. Yet undeserved censure and unwise praise have failed—both—to lower the prestige of the most tragic King in history.

What was the character—what was the aim—of this King who dismissed his Parliaments and ruled alone? The acts of Charles were of two kinds; those dictated by his heart and those instigated by his head. Where his feelings were concerned the King was hasty and rash. His mind worked slowly but clearly and showed the discretion of a statesman. Because his mental processes were slow, he was often irresolute and acted before he had really decided. His enemies called him insincere—as a matter of fact he was merely undecided. With a strong Minister at his elbow Charles I would have been a great King. Unfortunately he was King and Prime Minister

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both—a Wilhelm I without his Bismarck. This lack of statesman-like counsel explains many mistakes of the reign.

The Court was serious, far from extravagant and favoured no immorality. After the death of Buckingham the King got on better with the Queen when she had ceased to miss the intriguing French Catholics who had come with her to England. A loyal and affectionate Queen was the reward of the King's devotion, and the influence of Henrietta Maria remained paramount with her husband up to the end. The King's melancholy dissolved before the gay vivacity of the Queen, and his manner grew more gracious as he saw more of his charming Consort. A fairly large family shared the King's love. Charles Prince of Wales; James Duke of York (afterwards Charles II and James II); Princess Henrietta, Princess Mary, the little Duke of Gloucester, and Princess Elizabeth—a charming family group.

For the administrative side of his kingship Charles had a decided gift including great executive ability. He insisted upon a close examination of all State papers, and was intolerant of errors, whether of judgment or merely technical.

To Buckingham's influence succeeded that of Wentworth and Laud—the Earl of Strafford and the Archbishop of Canterbury. They soon became sworn friends, and at the same time confidential Ministers of their Royal master. Strafford was a great statesman ; devoid of personal ambition, he was content to remain what he was, a great noble working for the State. As such, he was intolerant of the Commons, and wished the King to rule without their aid. “The grand manner” was his by right, and his influence over men was immense—by the force of character that was in him. His foreign policy was peaceful. He shared the views of Montrose, who wrote to the King from

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Scotland : "They will never rest until they have made you a man of straw."

Strafford had made a success of his Commissions. As Lord Deputy of Ireland, he had guided his Irish Parliaments with the iron hand in the velvet glove. He might have done the same in England. He was a born administrator—a strong, sincere, fearless servant of the King.

Laud was equally as sincere, but his discretion was less. In 1633 he who was Bishop of London, became Archbishop of Canterbury, an honour due to the great churchman. Unfortunately for him the Puritans, with their usual lack of intelligence, suspected him of leaning towards Rome—an unfounded but a dangerous feeling. The oft-quoted opinion expressed by Laud on the King is apocryphal, "A mild and gracious Prince who knows not how to be, or to be made, great." Such was Laud—a burning flame—*ignis ardens*—in his zeal for the

Church, unconscious that his religious fire was to consume both himself and his King.

During the peaceful interval of eleven years, the triumvirate—the King, Laud, and Strafford—governed, and governed with success. The King—gentle, gracious, good, and with a strong sense of duty ; Strafford—brave, forcible, relentless, sincere, reactionary ; Laud—faithful to King and Church, intolerant of any opposition to either.

Until 1636 there was perfect quiet in England, and during these peaceful years, on the Slepe Hall Estate, living the monotonous life so well described by Carlyle was a sturdy fanatic in the making ; a “solid, substantial, inoffensive farmer of St. Ives,” who was more or less of a hypochondriac, tainted with the ideas—or lack of ideas—of the Fifth Monarchy Men — one Oliver Cromwell, the man who, if he had failed, would have been branded as a rebel and a traitor ; the man who, as he succeeded at the sacrifice of his honour, became Lord

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Protector of England—the most overrated man in history, and the pet of those modern English “Democrats” whom he would have been the first to despise and exile.

Imagine Cromwell and Bernard Shaw ! Think of Cromwell’s comment on the “Lives” of him written by Lord Rosebery and Mr. Roosevelt and Lord Morley, “Lives” in which more of the author than the subject appears.

Cromwell’s mind compared with that of his contemporary, Lord Falkland, is like water compared with wine—and rather muddy water—yet who knows of Falkland ?

Cromwell’s religious fervour was partly real religious mania and partly pose. He began as a sincere but unsuccessful reformer, he ended as an insincere but successful politician—a possible good man gone wrong.

Until the end of 1636, peace brooded over England. Then came distant murmurs of the coming storm. The advertising

Hampden, the Labour Member of the time, was to call in question the legality of ship-money ; and the loyal Scots were troubled by the incredible folly of Laud in pressing his Prayer Book upon the Church of St. Giles in 1637. Thunder was in the air.

CHAPTER VII

UNPEACEFUL YEARS

UNTIL 1637, when there was trouble in Scotland, the personal rule of Charles had been a success. The loyalty of the Scots had been shown at the Coronation in 1633 at Holyrood when Charles was crowned King of Scots ; but there was even then a hint of the troubles to come—troubles of which Laud was the far from innocent cause. In the days to come the loyalty of the Scots proved a broken reed for the King, although for his son and grandson it revived in all its former strength. There is no doubt that the King was unjustly blamed for the acts of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

As one authority well puts it, the differ-

ence between the possible Church of the Commons and the actual Church of Laud, was one of organic principle—the Commons insisted on uniformity of belief, while the Archbishop was satisfied with uniformity of ritual, a distinction clearly with a difference. There had been some outcry over the famous “Declaration” that after service on Sundays the people might enjoy their sports in good old English fashion. The Puritans made a great scandal over this, considering it more fitting that the people should sit at home in Sunday gloom and praise the Lord by getting drunk. The Declaration on Uniformity also (still found in the Prayer Book) was criticized as well. Laud of course was the instigator of both Declarations. The outcry against Laud was machine-made, although he weakened his position by having the Declaration of Sports read in churches—an act hardly necessary, although it must be re-

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membered the Declaration had first been made in the reign of James I.

Up to now in the contest between King and Commons the nation had sided with the King, whose position was in accordance with precedent.

So much drivel has been written by time-serving party hacks who called themselves "historians" on the encroachment by the King on the Constitution, that it is hard to remember that the Commons were encroaching on the powers of the King. Falkland on behalf of the King saw this clearly, and stated it without the hysteria that weakened Cromwell's arguments for the Commons. Gardiner says, "Never since the accession of the Stuart Dynasty had the finances been in so flourishing a condition as in 1638." If financial prosperity is a test of success, Charles' personal rule was no failure.

The greatest mistake made by the King

was his decision to add to his revenues by levying ship-money. There was little public excitement over the levy until Hampden and a few others courted publicity by refusing to pay the tax. The absurd eulogy lavished on this passive resister for his non-payment of a county rate is dear to demagogues of all ages—but it is rather ridiculous. If immortality is the reward of failure to pay one's taxes, Olympus must be overcrowded.

English counties bordering on the sea were forced to provide a certain number of ships for the King to protect the narrow seas. Charles, however, made a change in announcing that he would accept a money payment instead. This money payment was exacted from the inland counties, and in their case was of doubtful legality, as there was no precedent. The judges, however, did not consider precedent binding. There is much to be said on both sides.

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England, however, needed a navy. Parliament was not in session, and patriotism should not have balked at technicalities. The whole country was interested in the navy. Why should the sea-board counties bear the whole burden? In this connection it should be noted that the proceeds of all the levies made by the King were used for the benefit of the nation and not for his own pleasure or profit. The logical course of events is here curious. The agitation against the levy of ship-money would have died down had not Parliament been summoned in 1640.

Parliament was called together on account of the Scotch troubles, for which Laud was responsible—hence the meeting of Parliament was the cause of the rebellion.

The riots of July, 1637, when the Prayer Book was introduced at St. Giles', led to the Glasgow Assemblies and the Solemn League

and Covenant. The signers of the Covenant were Royalists as a rule, loyal to the Stuarts, but fiercely intolerant of any interference with their religion. Scotland was in a turmoil of confusion ; several provisional Governments were in existence and border raids were imminent.

Twice Charles was defeated by the Covenanters—once in 1637, once in 1640, and the fanatical Calvinists were not soothed by their successes. Had Charles been victorious he could easily have crushed out the smouldering embers of discontent in England ; defeated, the flames grew slowly, but bit deeply into the national edifice.

The Treaty of Ripon was a confession of failure ; the two northern counties were to remain in charge of the Scots until the provisions of the Treaty were fulfilled, the Scots army meanwhile receiving £25,000 for its successful treason—the Scots were ever philanthropists. North of the Tay, how-

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ever, the clans were loyal, and the Highlanders, unlike the Lowlanders, had little in common with the ten lost tribes, guided as they were by James Graham, Duke of Montrose, who was no huckster.

Charles' finances were now exhausted, and on Strafford's advice he summoned the "Short Parliament" on April 13th, 1640, and dissolved it again on May 5th.

Another mistake was made by the King in dismissing this Parliament, which was strongly Royalist and well disposed to His Majesty. According to Clarendon, it was the fault of Sir Harry Vane, who was jealous of Strafford and a friend of Pym. The King wished to have twelve "subsidies" in exchange for ship-money, which was to be abandoned, but Strafford persuaded him to let Vane tell the Commons he would be content with eight. Vane, however, played a double game. He informed the Commons that the King was displeased with them, and

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then gave the King to understand that the Commons were disloyal. Upon this Charles with promptitude and acting from his heart instead of from his head dissolved Parliament. It was a fatal error.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

AND now naked and unashamed the ghost of rebellion stalked through Merrie England. Religious imbeciles prated of themselves as the weapons of God, and blasphemed against the Most High. Their name for the Cavaliers was "Malignants"—an echo of their own malignancy. Indeed, the epidemic form of morbid Puritanism resembled in no slight degree the epidemic of tarantella dancing in the kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies—a pity it did not take the form of sleeping-sickness. Strafford now came to the fore; he had come from his Irish Lordship to help the King whose funds were exhausted, and his first practical act was to raise £20,000 for the public services. The

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King, however, found the expenses of an army enormous ; and with reluctance, and ungraciously, the King was forced to summon another Parliament, much less loyal than the "Short Parliament." Public sentiment was craftily stirred against the King ; play was made of his Scottish defeats, and there was much criticism of the sudden dissolution of Parliament.

On a drear November day—the 3rd—in 1640, the ill-omened "Long Parliament" met in London.

The Royalists (the Anglicans) and the Parliament men (chiefly Presbyterians) were face to face ; and wise men all through England prayed for agreement and hoped that the spectre of rebellion might pass from their fair land. Their prayer, however, was not to be granted, although keener minds could see hope for the future in the dislike of the frothing mouthy Independents for the Presbyterians.

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At the outset the chances were balanced, but the Puritans did not hesitate to doctor the weights to bring the balance down on their side. They struck heavily and at once. After one week Strafford was impeached. Strafford's defence was brilliant ; it was a record of unbroken success ; yet it availed him little. The influence of Pym was paramount with this Parliament, and Pym was jealous of Strafford. Pym—a man with a small mind, petty, revengeful—saw his chance, and Strafford and Laud were sent to the Tower. At one time Pym and Strafford had been friends, when both were opposed to Buckingham ; but, when their careers parted, Strafford's leading to power and Pym's to obscurity, Pym had made a threat Strafford would have done well to heed :—

“ You are going to leave us I see ; but we will never leave you while you have a head on your shoulders.”

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Here the King may be justly criticized. Strafford, in feeble health, had not wished to come to London. He knew that in Yorkshire among his own people Pym was powerless, but he dreaded London town. The King was persistent, naturally anxious to have his powerful Minister by his side ; he promised the Earl that if he came not a hair of his head should be in danger.

Trusting to his Sovereign's word the fated man hurried to Westminster—to lodge in the Tower.

During the time of his impeachment and trial Strafford, according to an authority, behaved very nobly, and ate his heart out imputing blame to no one.

The King never forgave himself for his surrender to the morbid fanatics who clamoured for Strafford's death, and regarded his own murder as in a sense an act of expiation for Strafford's execution.

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That the childish charges against the Earl of Strafford should culminate in an accusation of high treason is almost unbelievable. If there was any traitor, it was Pym, not Strafford, who is now restored to his proper place in history. Every lying art was successfully used to obtain a verdict of guilty, and every pressure brought to bear on the King and Queen to confirm the verdict. The House of Lords acted, as judges, with fairness ; but when the Commons, fearful that the frivolity of their evidence would be recognized, resorted to an Act of Attainder, a small majority carried the Act, and Lords became equally guilty with Commons in the ignominious proceedings. It was a hard matter to get Charles' consent, but it was finally wrung from him on the only ground that led him to consent—that so England might be saved from civil war. He was warned that the Queen's life was in peril, and in his agony for country and

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Queen, he passed the Bill—and at Strafford's own request. He had written to the King: "So now to set Your Majesty's conscience at liberty I do most humbly beseech Your Majesty to pass this Bill. . . . Sir, my consent shall more acquit you herein to God than all the world can do besides. To a willing man there is no injury done."

Strafford was sincere in what he had written, but believed the King would protect him to the end. "Put not your trust in Princes," he said, when he heard that the unhappy King had consented—more anxious for the King's honour than for his own life. He was ready to go. For his country he had done his best, his King—honestly anxious to keep civil war from his people—had failed him; his health had broken, there was little to live for. He had wished to say farewell to his venerable friend Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, but the Lieu-

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tenant of the Tower refused permission ; but from the window of his cell Laud blessed his friend as the sad procession passed on at dawn to Tower Hill. From the headsman's block Strafford sent his farewells. "I thank God," said he, "I am not afraid of death, nor daunted with any discouragement, but do as cheerfully put off my doublet at this time as ever I did when I went to bed." Such was the end of the Earl of Strafford on May 12th, 1641.

The King paid bitterly for his mistake in consenting to the execution. Firmness at that time would have curbed the insolent Commons ; this giving in only encouraged their greed for more and greater concessions. During the next fourteen months the contest between the King and the coming rebellion, personified in Pym, was bitter to a degree.

The rebellion broke out in the summer

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of 1642, and the King went into camp at Nottingham on August 22nd, a step regretted most by Falkland and his followers. The country at large was tired of the tension, and was eager for acts and some form of settlement that would confirm either King or Commons in authority—the people did not much care which, although loyalty to King was a more tangible and satisfactory thing than loyalty to a sour abstraction like a Parliament. Strafford's death convinced the King that Parliament wished to deprive him of all the constitutional privileges vested in the Sovereign. Pym—the Parliament incarnate—believed (or said he believed) that Charles was aiming at despotic power. No *via media* could bridge such different ways of thought, and each side hastened with grim joy to the arbitrament of the sword.

The Commons had passed a Bill which provided that Parliament could not be dis-

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solved without its own consent. It is an awful thought—that the Long Parliament might be sitting yet! This is merely one instance of the encroachment upon the Royal prerogative—one of many. The Court of Star Chamber, by this time abolished, never deserved the hard things said of it—too much importance has been attached to what was merely a peg on which to hang denunciations of the King.

The actual cause of the raising of the Royal Standard at Nottingham was the seizure of the munitions of war at Hull, stored by the King for his northern expedition. On the 18th of August the Parliament had the incredible audacity to denounce as traitors all who gave aid to the King. Traitors were good judges of treachery. This followed hard on the King's natural refusal to accept the policy of the egregious Pym set forth in written propositions, placed before His Majesty on June 3rd. These

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absurd claims of Parliament included the following conditions :—

No new Peers were to be allowed to sit without the consent of the Commons.

The children of Catholics were to be educated as Protestants.

The Commons were to select the Judges, the King's Guard, the King's Council, and the King's officials.

These conditions were, of course, offered to be declined—they were to be used as an excuse to start what the Puritans called a “war”—but it was a traitors' war. Charles throughout preserved a wonderful self-control. After Strafford's execution he went to Scotland at Montrose's instigation, and was well received. This was a wise act ; but it was neutralized by his attempt to arrest the five members. His visit to the Commons by the Queen's advice was a fatal error.

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The arrest would have been illegal, even if successful ; as a failure, the attempt was worse than illegal. Nothing remained but to fight it out.

CHAPTER IX

REBELLION

THE question as to who was responsible for the outbreak of armed rebellion is easy to answer.

Hallam, prejudiced as he was against the King, admits that the absurd claim of Parliament for the control of the militia could not be entertained by a constitutional monarch.

The Commons were not fighting for the liberties of the people, they were fighting for their own power as they would never have dared to fight against Henry VIII or Elizabeth.

The first rebellion began when the Royal Standard was raised at Nottingham on August 22nd, 1642 ; it virtually ended at

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Naseby on June 14th, 1645—though there were desultory engagements till the end of the year. The tide of battle ebbed and flowed during these years within well-defined limits. Before the fighting began the Parliament men professed to believe that one short campaign would convince the King of their overwhelming superiority. Probably there were men with the King who were hardly less confident. Both were mistaken. The hostile forces, so far as we can judge, were not unequally matched. Before many weeks had passed it was found that the main strength of the Puritans lay in the eastern and south-eastern counties, the main strength of the King in the northern, the south-western and the Welsh. At one time a line drawn from Berwick-on-Tweed to the Isle of Wight would have separated the districts friendly or hostile to Charles; as the Royalists grew strong the line might have been drawn from Bridling-

ton Bay to the Solent; as their strength waned, from Chester to Exeter along the borders of Wales. But even when the fortunes of the Puritans were at their darkest a narrow band of Parliamentary counties—Lancaster, Cheshire, Stafford, Warwick—divided the Royalist north from the Royalist south. The separation was always a grave misfortune for Charles—he was strong at York, he was strong at Oxford; but going from one to the other he had to pass through an enemy's country. London was the Parliamentary capital, Oxford the Royalist; but soon after the commencement of the war the great cities of Bristol, York, and Exeter declared for, or were captured by, the King; and each became a separate base of operations for the Royalists' generals. It may be said with confidence that without London the Parliament would have been powerless; and it was only on its democratic handicraftsmen

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and truculent apprentices that they could count with confidence. The moneyed men were mostly for the King. Prince Rupert—Rupert of the Rhine—was a strong asset of the King; a dashing cavalry leader, he harassed the sneaking Roundheads and won some glorious victories. His boldness spoiled his strategy, or he would have won Edgehill and London. So Marston Moor was lost—so Naseby. The other two great Royalist generals were Brentford and Hopton. The King himself was a soldier King and brave, like all the Stuarts. It must be admitted that he bore himself well throughout the war. He was ready to welcome any overture for peace. He made the first advances; he would, in his own words, “take the honey out of the gall.” Some hysterical historians insist that he was unduly obstinate. The pretensions of the Parliament, however, as we have seen, were exorbitant, and it cannot be said that they were abated by

disaster. No basis for peace could be found in such an attitude.

The propositions submitted on various occasions by the Parliament to the King, with a victorious army and a clear half of England behind him, were simply preposterous. When the tide began to turn in their favour their conditions of peace became more and more intolerable. After the first eighteen months the fortunes of the Royalists began to decline, especially at Marston Moor on July 2nd, 1644, and at Naseby on June 14th, 1645.

At this time Cromwell, now more of a soldier and less of a zealot, began to remodel his army, and the discipline of his well-paid mercenaries carried the day. Cromwell was not a great general, he was a lucky one ; the highest praise would call him an efficient drill sergeant.

In the first rebellion the Queen herself was active in the field. A woman of

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supreme energy, she was never idle. On land or on water, she was equally in her element. Under the hottest fire of the enemy, or in the wildest winter weather, she proved herself the daughter of Henry of Navarre. On one occasion, we are told, she lay tossing for nine days on the boisterous North Sea. Never losing the high spirits which accompanied her in every position in which she was placed, she laughed heartily at the fears of her attendant ladies. "Comfort yourselves, my dears," she said, "Queens of England are never drowned." The Commons were furious ; they framed a Bill of Attainder ; had they caught her, she would have gone the way that Strafford and Laud had gone.

Next to Prince Rupert came a brilliant soldier who never failed to acquit himself with distinction. Montrose was the Scottish Falkland. When he entered public life he felt that the popular liberties were in peril ; and like Falkland and Strafford, he took

the popular side. But as soon as the suspicion crossed his mind that Argyle and the confederates were playing the King false, that they were aiming at political change rather than religious liberty, he quitted them at once and finally.

His Scotch campaign was the last glow of the setting sun of the fortunes of the King. Thereafter there was naught but gloom.

During the war, although Parliament was in session, its authority was lessening day by day. Even before the close of the first rebellion the army disdained what it considered the do-nothing policy of "the Rump." Cromwell, filling his army with Independents to the exclusion of Presbyterians, looked on them with suspicion ; and their only act of note was the execution of Laud, who had languished in the Tower for many weary months. When Charles left Oxford on April 27th, 1646, the struggle was practically over, particularly when he chose to go to the Scots army then before

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Newark. The Scots had informally intimated their desire to come to terms with him ; but he might have known that the question of religion would present a barrier. They were fanatical Presbyterians—far more fanatical than the English ; and Charles's obstinate loyalty to the Anglican Church never wavered. Even as a fugitive he would consent to no compromise that might weaken his Church. He would probably have fared better had he trusted himself to one or other of the English parties. The continued presence of a Scots army in England (when the war had ceased) was on all hands viewed with disfavour ; and when it was found that the King was in their camp, the desire to be rid of this flock of locusts naturally grew. Nor were the Scots unwilling to go. They had eaten up the northern counties. If they could get their bill settled, there was no reason why they should remain. But what was to be done with Charles ? It can be justly charged

against the Scots that they sold their King for £400,000. It is certainly not correct to say that the Scots sold Charles as Judas sold our Lord ; it would be nearer the mark to say that they held him as a "material guarantee" for payment of the debt due to them by the English Parliament. It does not admit of doubt that the possession of Charles's person tended, to say the least, to a prompt settlement of accounts. Unless they had got paid, the Scots would not have retired ; unless they had got Charles, the English would not have paid—at least till later. On the retirement of the Scots, Charles was sent by the Parliament to Holmby House, in Northamptonshire. After, he was in the custody of the rabid Independents. Thence it was but a step to Westminster Hall and the scaffold at Whitehall. That the King made a mistake in trusting the Scots under the circumstances is true. In ordinary times and during normal happenings the Stuarts could trust their northern

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subjects, but at this time the irritation caused by Laud's unwise attempts to ritualize the Kirk was too recent, the pain of recent religious wounds too keen, to allow the dormant loyalty of the Scots full play —*sunt lachrymae rerum.*

CHAPTER X

THE DEATH OF THE KING

A BRASS plate on the floor of Westminster Hall marks the spot where the King of England stood before his self-appointed judges and confounded their basely unsound platitudes. At the trial the King refused to plead, alleging the illegality of the Court.

So set were these regicides on the death of the King and their own advancement, that the Clerk of the Court, one John Phelps, a barrister of the Middle Temple, scrawled his name an unnecessary number of times over the formal writings of the Court.

After the trial the regicides issued a warrant as follows :—

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“TO COLONEL FRANCIS HACKER, COL-
ONEL HUNCKS, AND LIEUTENANT-
COLONEL PHAYR,

“AND TO EVERY OF THEM.

“At the High Court of Justice
for the Trying and Judging
of Charles Stuart, King of
England, 29th January, 1648.

“WHEREAS Charles Stuart, King of
England, is and standeth convicted, attainted
and condemned of High Treason and other
high Crimes ; and Sentence upon Saturday
last was pronounced against him by this
Court, To be put to death by the severing
of his head from his body ; of which
Sentence execution yet remaineth to be
done :

“These are therefore to will and require
you to see the said Sentence executed, in
the open Street before Whitehall, upon the
morrow, being the Thirtieth day of this
instant month of January, between the
hours of Ten in the morning and Five in

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the afternoon, with full effect. And for so doing, this shall be your warrant.

“And these are to require all Officers and Soldiers, and others the good People of this Nation of England, to be assisting unto you in this service.

“Given under our hands and seals,

“JOHN BRADSHAW,

“THOMAS GREY ‘LORD GROBY,’

“OLIVER CROMWELL.”

(And Fifty-six others.)

The trial was farce, the murder was tragedy. Never did Charles Stuart appear so great, never did the inborn nobility of the man appear to better advantage than before the little men of little minds who acted as his judges ; and nowadays in Westminster Hall who thinks of the “judges” —who even remembers their names ? It is of the murdered King one thinks—not of his murderers. And the last scene of all : the Majesty of England on the scaffold at

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Whitehall ! Pearls before swine ! And yet Charles the King was never more King of England than on the day of his murder. His speech on the scaffold is illuminating : he said, "And truly I desire their liberty and freedom as much as anybody whosoever ; but I must tell you that their liberty and freedom consists in having of government those laws by which their life and their good may be most their own. It is not having share in government, sirs ; that is nothing pertaining to them." The death of the Sovereign was the doom of Cromwell. England might forgive rebels—she could not pardon murderers. More than this—the killing of Charles I re-established monarchy in England for all time. When the head of Charles I was severed from his body England trembled. The King died like a king, like a Stuart, and like a man. Small wonder that the Royal Martyr's fate made Royalists of Roundheads. Small

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wonder that the Royal Ghost kept sleep
from Cromwell's eyes.

“He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene,
But with his keener eye
The axe's edge did try ;
Nor called the gods with vulgar spite
To vindicate his helpless right,
But bowed his comely head
Down—as upon a bed.”

CHAPTER XI

THE REACTION

WITH the murder of the King a dark pall of remorse and sorrow came heavily down on England. Cromwell had gone too far. From a so-called defender of the people's liberties he had become a regicide, and no diadem of Lord Protector could hide the mark of Cain upon his brow. Apart from the act considered as a crime, it was a political blunder from Cromwell's point of view. The tragic pathos of the last scene, the kingly dignity shown by "the Man Charles Stuart" on the scaffold, went home to unimaginative Englishmen as a lifelong imprisonment would not have done. The death at Whitehall relighted the torch of monarchy in England ; and Charles II was proclaimed in place of Charles I. The mid-

night funeral at Windsor in a snowstorm, when the White King was borne to his rest, only intensified the sense that a crime had been done by the nation. It must be remembered that to the great inarticulate mass of the English people the killing of the King was "the greatest murder committed that ever story mentioned except the crucifying of our Saviour." Nor was the reaction slow in coming. England stirred itself in its sleep, and a slow, dull sense of wickedness was abroad in the body politic. The dour Scotch Presbyterians shuddered at what they had done; and only the fanatic Anabaptists and Independents forbore to shed a tear at England's shame. The gentle, knightly, dauntless King was gone, and the scheming Squire of Huntingdon governed in his stead—governed a restless, bitter people, a people turning in the blindness of its agony to the next Stuart.

How Oliver Cromwell relentlessly forced England to obey by sheer force of numbers;

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how he intrigued with the Scotch and killed the Irish ; how Richard, his son, tried to imitate him and failed—(for while Oliver Cromwell had a certain factitious strength, the whole Cromwell family was mercenary and feeble to a degree)—how Monck was loyal to his King and brought him back to his adoring subjects, every schoolboy knows. As the bells pealed and the crowds shouted at the homecoming of the Merry Monarch, here and there a few skulking figures affronted the glad light of day—the pitiful remnants of “Cromwell’s Ironsides,”—most of them new gilded by Court favour. Charles Stuart was avenged.

CHAPTER XII

THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

HISTORY has summed up the case and given the verdict.

Charles I was a statesman, not a politician. Had he been both he would have saved his head and lost his reputation. The irritation of the nation, smarting under the clumsy and goading rule of James I—more clown than king—wanted a vent. This feeling, properly directed, would have been satisfied in foreign conquests, but direction of any kind, safe or otherwise, was lacking. The King, trusting his subjects, was misled by traitors working for their own ends, and was too gentle with the mob. As man Charles I was too good for his people, as King he was not strong enough.

The verdict of history has taken a con-

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crete form. Looking up Whitehall, on a charger, sceptre in hand, Le Sueur's statue of the White King dominates the scene of his martyrdom. Of all the Royal statues in London this is beyond all doubt the most impressive, not on account of its artistry or the tragic site, but because it is the statue of Charles the Martyr King.

What names of his reign rank with the King's? Laud? Strafford?—victims of abortive ambition both. Pym? Hampden?—successful Jack Cade and Wat Tyler. Oliver Cromwell?—here we are on different ground. A man of mediocre abilities, quick to seize a chance, he reaped where the Stuarts had sown—a cuckoo in the Royal nest. In spite of the nauseous mid-Victorian hero-worship lavished on the “Lord Protector” (he protected his family well), he remains an accident in English History, while the discords of the jangling air of democracy he played on an imitation Royal harp have

The Verdict of History 95

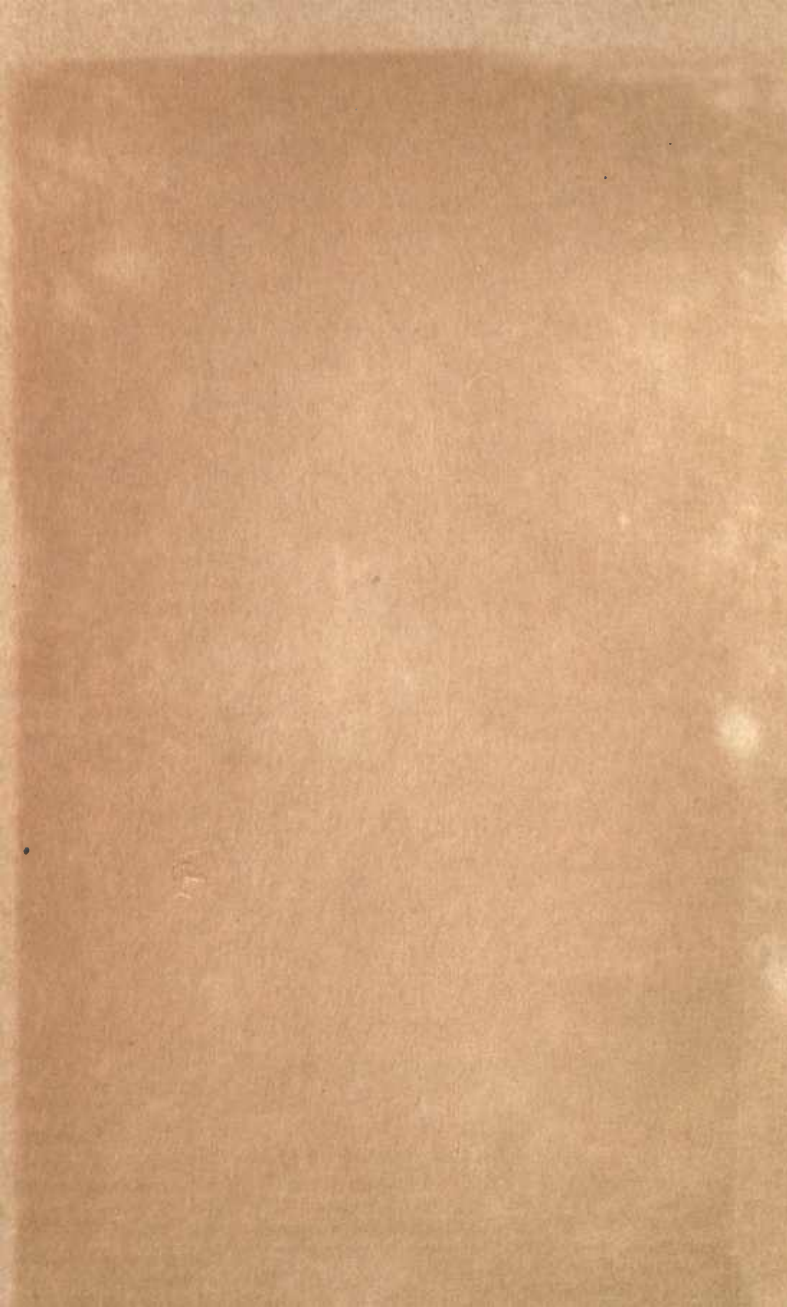
hardly yet died away. Even among his soldiers Cromwell was not the idol "democrat" historians have asserted. How absurd was the description "Cromwell's Ironsides" is shown by the fact that Monck proved them to be laths painted to look like iron when he proclaimed King Charles II. Praise of Cromwell is a slowly dying fashion, but the Stuarts are coming into their own again. It has been a common error to call them ungrateful, but if the Stuarts had been less generous and more forgetful there would be three more English Kings in History—a James III, a Charles Edward, and a Henry IX. If King Charles I had directly succeeded his grandmother, Mary Queen of Scots, England would have escaped the unfortunate reign of James I, and English History, lacking the Commonwealth, would be a cleaner thing. James, for the time, destroyed the dignity of Royalty. Charles restored it, but at the cost of his life.

96 King Charles I : a Study

In spite of his mistakes, in spite of his misplaced trust in Roundhead and Cavalier alike, "the Man Charles Stuart" remains the King of Romance—the tragic King—the great—but the unfortunate—King of England.

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